3: Skrine G-3 (1922-1924) 1926 All Sinkiang All

told us that Great Old Father Ch'en, who had been for six years Magistrate of Khotan, was responsible for the edifice—a kind of mausoleum of his official ambitions. The inscription told of the mighty deeds of Ch'en, how he had built schools and temples and repaired roads, how he had girdled Khotan New City with walls and acted justly in the sight of men. Finally the names were given of those who had sent petitions to Urumchi praying for the retention at Khotan of the said Great Old Father. Within the building as we sat drinking ceremonial tea provided by our absent host in a room decorated with pleasing frescoes, Chu translated to us a Chinese poem which adorned one of the walls. It told how a certain Emperor of the T'ang Dynasty summoned his Prime Minister, one Hsü, and said to him, "Hsü, thou art the most faithful and the most honoured of my counsellors, yet there are men who speak ill of thee, and complaints have reached mine ears. How is this?" Hsü prostrated himself and replied (but in far more flowery terms), "Sire, the floods of spring are welcome to the farmers, but travellers speak many hard words of them; the moon of autumn is loved of lovers, but robbers like her not." The Emperor, understanding, bade his minister arise, and Hsü basked once more in the full radiance of the Imperial countenance.

I am told that Ch'en was a strong and severe Magistrate; he had a habit, among others, of hamstringing thieves which resulted, towards the end of his time, in the almost complete boycott of Khotan by the light-fingered fraternity. Officials of this type are unpopular the world over, not least among the very classes whose property they protect. Town walls, again, are not appreciated by the inhabitants of Sinkiang as they ought to be, owing to the fact that forced labour is used exclusively in their construction; they are in fact "public works" in the fullest sense, in that the public has to work, and work hard, to make them. One can guess that complaints began to reach the ears of the Governor at Urumchi and eventually resulted in the replacement of Ch'en, who has doubtless ever since regarded himself as the victim of intrigue—hence the little story which adorns the walls of his drawing-room.

Khotan, 25th November, 1922.

Khotan is not a large town, but it is busy and prosperous and makes the most of itself to the traveller. You come first to the "New" or Chinese city, which is square and measures about half a mile each way with massive walls in good repair and bastions crowned with pagodas along them. Here are the Yamens of the officials, the barracks and magazine, the Taoist temple and several streets of shops. Then, passing under a gateway in the walls in the middle of the main bazaar, you find yourself in the Old City, which, unlike Kashgar and Yarkand, consists of one long, winding, up-and-down bazaar, well-roofed throughout, with an irregular fringe of town on either side all mixed up with private gardens, mosques, cornfields, open market-places and cemeteries. Old Badruddin's house where we are staying is right in the middle of the most crowded part of the bazaar, and yet you can escape through the orchard into a lane among cornfields leading into the open country. I am ensconced in a grand room looking on to the garden, with numerous real glass windows and shutters to them, a fireplace and a Russian stove as well. D. chose

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343 a cosier and more private apartment; she has but one lattice window, but that looks down on to the roof of a carpenter's house, on which the women sit spinning and sewing in the sun all day long; cocks and hens peck about amid heaps of shavings, and children clad in long boots, greatcoat and nothing else peep over the edge into the street, tumble down the ladder into the shop and otherwise enjoy themselves without anyone minding. Children are cheap in this fat, easy-going land.

Khotan, 27th November, 1922.

574 We have just returned (8 p.m.) from an interesting but arctic dinner-party at the Yamen. Our hosts, the Amban and Commandant, had arranged a theatrical performance for the occasion, a great honour. D. and I were met within the Yamen by two parallel processions headed by our hosts and their wives respectively; I was led with much ceremony to one dinner-table and D. to another separated from the men by a low partition. The travelling company's stage was set in the open courtyard opposite us.

353 The prevailing note of the decorations was red; the walls of the Yamen building behind were covered with fine scarlet embroidery and scrolls of the same colour inscribed with Chinese characters in gold; under-foot were red Khotan carpets, while from the roof of the portico and the branches of the trees in the courtyard hung scores of red Chinese lanterns. Most of the latter were of paper, but several of them were of the beautiful and fantastic hexagonal pattern with panels of embroidered silk and long coloured tassels. Major Ma told me that most of the embroidery had been done by Turki women in Khotan, but he hastened to add that the Khotanis had learnt embroidery from the Chinese.

574 The dinner lasted some four hours, and the theatrical performance went on all the time.[1] After sunset the temperature sank to several degrees below freezing-point, and I nearly froze to death. The Chinese never mind how cold it is, for their winter clothes and boots, lined with fur throughout, are as admirably designed to withstand cold as their summer costume is to keep its wearers cool. D. says she was better off, thanks to large braziers which were kept under the table well stoked with wood-embers. She was charmed with the little Chinese ladies, who wore the regulation black satin tunic and trousers and their hair scraped back and twisted into small buns lavishly decorated with ornaments of jade and precious stones. By far the loveliest of her hostesses, however, was a Turki girl from the Titai's household at Kashgar, who was married to one of the military officers. She had, according to D.—I missed this vision—a perfect profile and small oval face, a complexion like a wild rose and large limpid dark eyes; her voice, like those of the beauties of Kashgar, had a kind of uneven tone with long, full, liquid notes.

291 The ex-Amban's mother, with whom D. exchanged calls yesterday, was not at the dinner. She, according to D., might have stepped straight out of a fairy-story. She looks about a hundred and fifty, wears a black silk handkerchief tied round her head like a pirate, and owns an enormous woolly black cat which adores her and sits all the time licking her hands and face.

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[1] For a description of a Chinese theatrical performance, see pp. 245–7.